Style Book for NOAA's Web Presence

Concept of Operations

Principles Guiding the Design and Function of NOAA Web Sites

Various elements, organization, layout, logos, content, etc., combine to form a NOAA web site. The inclusion, characteristics, and method of employment of the various elements are the subject of this Guide. *Some of the elements are **mandatory**, some optional*, and others exist within a range of possibilities. This Guide is the stylistic touchstone for participation in NOAA's web presence. The NOAA Enterprise Working Group is responsible for maintaining this document. Individual Line Offices in conjunction with this document have developed specific guidance on mandatory and recommended elements for developing web sites within their organizations. Please consult your CIO for further specific guidance. DOC policies can be found at: http://www.osec.doc.gov/webresources/DOCWebPolicies_BestPractices.html

The core principle of style for a web site is to provide a clear NOAA program identification and mission execution. Support for NOAA's mission as detailed in the NOAA Strategic Plan is the primary purpose of any NOAA web site. A NOAA web site is a virtual location for an informational transaction between NOAA and its user community. The quality of the web site is a function of the success of the informational transaction in terms of utility and effectiveness, efficiency, and security.

Different Groups of Users Have Different Relationships with NOAA

NOAA Corporate Image Starts at the Top
(vertical structure)

The NOAA homepage is the main gateway to the NOAA webspace. The homepage is the pinnacle of the structure of NOAA websites. The webspace is organized vertically as well as horizontally. Most users access the NOAA websites at the upper pages, especially first-time visitors and those seeking new information among the local sites. Experienced users are more likely to enter deeper inside the webspace. In any case the user should always be aware when he or she is in the NOAA webspace. Developers should familiarize themselves with DOC, NOAA, and Line Office specific guidance prior to developing and implementing web pages.

The NOAA homepage sits alone at the top of the NOAA webspace. All other NOAA sites are in a subordinate relationship to the homepage. The degree of stylistic or design control decreases with distance from the homepage. However, "first impressions count" so it's important to establish at first contact the desired corporate image for NOAA and it's necessary to maintain relatively tight stylistic control at the top pages. Room for stylistic freedom expands as the user moves deeper into the NOAA webspace and closer to the local sites, as shown below:

> Degree 0   The NOAA homepage - Unique design under control of *the NOAA CIOs*.

1st degree	Homepages for Neighborhoods, Line Offices, and Major Programs - Conforms to the layout guide in Attachment *A*, with full banner and footer, link to NOAA, standard navigation elements, etc.;
2nd degree	All other authored pages - May conform to standard layout template or reduced layout requirements such as a mini-banner and footer, link to parent organization, etc.;
3rd degree	Query-generated data pages and other generated data pages - If possible, identification in browser as NOAA product, at a minimum, prints with URL identifying NOAA origin.

Attachment *B* specifies the stylistic and design control for website elements as the distance from the homepage increases. The NOAA Web Presence Working Group (created pursuant to OCIO Policy Directive W-3) and the individual line and staff office web governance bodies may provide additional web style and design advice.

(horizontal structure)
The members of NOAA's web user community tend to gather into areas of common interest. The mix of informational transactions taking place in these "neighborhoods" varies with the users' needs. Likewise, the style of NOAA's web presence in a neighborhood should fit the mix of informational transactions occurring there. The mandatory elements of NOAA web sites are common to the styles of all neighborhoods. Line office governance provides guidance on developing and implementing these neighborhoods. The particular implementation may vary and the optional and discretionary elements should be fitted to the characteristics of the neighborhood.

Four neighborhoods form the web user community of NOAA:

1. General public - Main gateway to NOAA webspace, open to all, strong general information, educational component. Attractive design and vibrant content is especially effective with this group. These sites are usually organized according to themes.

2. Work-a-day world - Community of regular users, such as fishermen, academia, weather information users, and vendors. These users typically seek particular information or services and know where they want to go. User-configurable portals would be useful to this group. These sites are usually organized according to NOAA's products and services.

3. Programmatic - Centered on NOAA and its partners engaged in program execution. This neighborhood benefits from the integration of enterprise activity and financial management. The sites are usually organized according to the Strategic Plan and program structure.

4.   Employee services - Human resources, employee development. Sites for this group can be organized according to the NOAA organization structure.

A website will be more successful when the user can conveniently access the desired mix of content from a single, central location. The map described above helps orient the site manager in the webspace and so more successfully structure the content around a natural reference point. The manager of a NOAA site should carefully consider the natural neighborhood of the user in designing the site. Of course, hyperlinking allows content to exist simultaneously in multiple virtual locations. The goal is to organize a hyperlinked structure that serves the needs of the user.

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Style and Design Guidance for NOAA Web Pages

Page Element	Description	Distance from NOAA homepage		
		1st Degree	**2nd Degree**	**3rd Degree**
Banner	Identifies owner or sponsor of the site and the site's purpose. Can contain graphics and text/titles that describe the purpose of the website or activity represented by the website.	Mandatory	Mandatory	Recommended, should be used if nature of page allows.
NOAA emblem	A symbolic design used to identify NOAA as an organization within the Department of Commerce.	Mandatory	Mandatory	Discretionary
Program Graphical Identifier	Visual device used to indicate a relationship between the site and a NOAA organization or program.	Subject to approval by CIO of responsible NOAA organization.	Subject to approval by CIO of responsible NOAA organization.	Subject to approval by CIO of responsible NOAA organization.
Subject-related text or title, graphic	Text and/or graphics specifying or conveying the purpose of the site. Graphics should be selected with care in terms of subject matter and tone, should reflect positively on NOAA.	Recommended	Recommended	Discretionary
Other navigation	Links to major sub-divisions of the website or activity represented by the website.	Recommended	Recommended	Recommended, should be used if nature of page allows.
Major Navigation Pane	Primarily to websites of related activities and organizations. Secondarily, links to major sub-divisions of the website or activity represented by the website.	Recommended location for such links, if such links are placed on the page.	Recommended location for such links, if such links are placed on the page.	Recommended, should be used if nature of page allows.
Search engine	Utility allowing user to search the web site for content, using keywords or string searches.	Recommended	Discretionary	Discretionary, probably superfluous.
Minor Navigation Pane *Optional*	Links to websites related thematically or by subject.	Recommended location for such links, if such links are placed on the page.	Recommended location for such links, if such links are placed on the page.	Recommended, should be used if nature of page allows.
Central Interface	Location for the content, combination of information and functionality, that is purpose of the site. Can include a flyover site map.	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory, with modifications dictated by the nature of the page.
Footer	Location for required site information. Essentially, the "fine print" or "boilerplate".	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory, if the nature of the page allows, with modifications dictated by the nature of the page.
Owner	NOAA organization responsible for managing the page.	Mandatory	Mandatory	Recommended, should be used if nature of page allows.
Date last modified (*optional*) Date last reviewed	Date page last updated (*reviewed*).	Mandatory	Mandatory	Recommended, should be used if nature of page allows.
Disclaimer(s)	Disclaimers required by Departmental policy.	Mandatory	Mandatory	Recommended, should be used if nature of page allows.
Notice(s)	Notices required by Departmental policy.	Mandatory	Mandatory	Recommended, should be used if nature of page allows.
Contact information	Information/functionality for contacting representative of owner organization.	Mandatory	Mandatory	Recommended, should be used if nature of page allows.

NOAA Homepage Layout

Mandatory elements for 1st degree homepages for Neighborhoods, Line Offices, and Major Programs,
in a recommended representative layout.
Presumptive layout for 2nd degree homepages for lower-level offices, smaller programs, laboratories,
activities, teams, etc.
Recommended model layout for 2nd degree non-homepages.

Banner

NOAA Emblem	Subject-related text or title, graphic	Major Program Insignia or Logo
Other Navigation	Other Navigation	Other Navigation

Search engine ***Major Navigation Pane*** (faux frame) Site map	***Central Interface***	***Minor Navigation Pane*** *(optional)* (faux frame)

Footer

Owner	Last date modified / reviewed Notice(s) Disclaimer(s)	Contact Information